

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

Witness Statement

PROPOSED DESIGNATION

JAMES PEAK WILDERNESS AND PROTECTION AREA

Before I begin my testimony, please refer to the map included in your packet. If you would please follow this map as I speak, I think I will be able to provide you with not only the flavor of this special area, but a small glimpse of its history as well.

Some 11,000 to 12,000 years ago, it is probable that humans entered the area during periods of glacial retreat, and again approximately 8,000 years ago. During warmer periods, Native Americans spent winters in the warmer foothills of the eastern slope, and sheltered valleys on Colorado's western slopes. Studies have shown that there were four different cultural complexes known to be present above timberline in the Indian Peaks area during these years. [\(1\)](#)

Native Americans, and later settlers, entered a majestic valley, now known as Grand County, via a pass which today is Rogers Pass (see section 3.1 on the map). This pass was used to transport goods into the settlers of the valley, as well as wild game to the mining towns of Black Hawk, Central City, and the growing metropolis of Denver. Early settlers found this route difficult at best, but it was the main artery of commerce. Ranchers in the area trailed domesticated cattle over this pass to the railhead in Black Hawk and Denver as late as 1923. [\(2\)](#)

With the expansion of rail across the nation, this area was the first entry point of the railroad into Grand County and points west. The Rollins Pass rail line a.k.a Corona Pass, and later the Moffat Tunnel provided many a visitor a spectacular introduction to the majestic Rocky Mountains.

Front range water providers rely on the pristine waters of the western slope, and use this area as a diversion point to transport western slope waters to the thriving communities on the front range.

As you can see, the area that we are discussing today has been a critical transportation link to not only Grand County, but to destinations west. Today, U.S. Highway #40 over Berthoud Pass skirts this area and serves as a view point for James Peak itself. The Moffat Tunnel passes close by, running under the Continental Divide, and has replaced the historic Rollins Pass railway. Because of the diverse history of the area, it is important to place a designation on the area that not only protects its aesthetic and environmental contributions, but also recognizes the historical as well as present day uses.

An additional benefit of the James Peak Wilderness process has been to open an avenue of mutual interest between Grand County and her sister county, Gilpin. The historic Rollins Pass a.k.a Corona Pass railway has fallen into disrepair. The Needles Eye Tunnel, through which the railway crossed the Continental Divide, is no longer passable. Both Grand County and Gilpin County have entered into conversation on how

to re-open this historic route. This negotiation can be supported by the designations proposed by Grand County for the James Peak Wilderness and Protection Area.

When Congressman Mark Udall first proposed wilderness designation for the James Peak Area, I and my fellow county commissioners, Bob Anderson and Duane Dailey, entered into a public information gathering process with no preconceived opinions. We were made aware of the Forest Service Management Plan that applied to this area, and began our education by familiarizing ourselves with the plan, how it originated, and what the designations within the plan meant. This plan had recently been completed and adopted by the Forest Service, and had years of study applied to its determinations.

Our second step was to hold meetings to gather public input on the proposal. The first public meeting was held in the lodge atop Winter Park Ski Area, overlooking the proposed area. Congressman Udall attended and spoke to the gathering. Many people attended the meeting, and gave testimony. This meeting ended with a request for written comments and concerns to be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners. Based on the comments, it was apparent that a majority of the public who were involved did not favor a wilderness designation for the entire area proposed.

Grand County is the location of the first Protection Area Designation, known as the Bowen Gulch Protection Area. A Protection Area, like wilderness designation, must be approved by Congress. Unlike wilderness designation, a Protection Area has its own unique set of rules and regulations, designed to protect the area, while acknowledging historic uses. The Board of County Commissioners felt that a portion of the proposed James Peak Wilderness Area did not fit wilderness designation, but could be preserved with a Protection Area Designation. The Forest Service Management Plan supported this thought, as it designated this area as a Special Interest area (see area 3.1 on the map).

Following the initial public meeting, Grand County held three additional public meetings, as well as five public negotiation sessions with Congressman Udall and/or his staff. The main issue of these negotiations was Congressman Udall's designation of area 3.1 as wilderness study area, and Grand County's opinion that area 3.1 should be designated as a Protection Area.

However, area 3.1 had gone through wilderness study during the Forest Service Management Plan update, and was found not to carry the attributes necessary for wilderness designation. Grand County felt that the professionals employed by the United States Forest Service to make these determinations based on exact, approved criteria, were those whose input should be recognized in this matter. The public agreed with the determinations of the Forest Service during the public scoping process associated with the adoption of the Forest Service Management Plan. Grand County cannot agree with area 3.1 being designated as a wilderness study area. While Grand County would not oppose this area again being studied for wilderness designation if proposed during the next Forest Management Plan update, to so designate it now does not seem appropriate in view of the recent wilderness study determination.

It should be noted that Grand County, while objecting to the wilderness designation for area 3.1, did propose wilderness designation for area 1.2. Area 1.2 was **not** proposed for wilderness designation by Congressman Udall, but had met the criteria for wilderness designation in the Forest Management Plan, and was recommended for that designation. Grand County proposed to add area 1.2 to wilderness designation, and this was done by Congressman Udall.

Grand County feels strongly that any wilderness proposal should begin at the local level, gathering the comments from those who are most familiar with the area, and then proceeding up the ladder to those who

ultimately make the determination. This method could shorten the time involved in a wilderness designation approval by highlighting concerns early on. Colorado Counties, Inc. has monitored Grand County's process, and has proposed the process be used in the proposed wilderness designation for B.L.M. lands in the west.

Grand County wants to thank Congressman Mark Udall and his staff for the hours of work that accompanies his proposal. Congressman Udall was most gracious in listening to the issues of the County and its citizens, and trying to formulate a compromise that could meet the concerns of all involved.

Senator Wayne Allard is to be praised for his participation in, and support of the process. His dedication to local input has allowed Grand County the ability to assist in the crafting of this important proposal.

Congressman Scott McInnis, whose western slope Colorado ties, have enabled him to grasp the big picture, and assist in moving this proposal to committee review has made an invaluable contribution to the process. His efforts are greatly appreciated.

In conclusion, Grand County feels that Congressman Udall's proposal with the amendment proposed by Congressman McInnis provides protection to the entire James Peak Area. Area 3.1 can experience an equally high level of protection by designation of " Special Interest" (Protection Area) vs. Wilderness Study Area. The original proposal, with the amendment, incorporates the historic attributes of mining, logging, railroading, and travel, and recognizes the current uses of mountain biking, snow mobile access, and hiking. It stops land exchanges, and provides for professional management by the United States Forest Service. The James Peak Wilderness and Protection Area has the potential of setting aside a spectacular piece of Americana for protection in perpetuity. The citizens of Grand County support the passage of the **James Peak Wilderness and Protection Area Act as set forth in the Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 1576 offered by Congressman Scott McInnis.**

Thank you for you time this morning. Please accept a personal invitation from Grand County and its citizens to visit our beautiful county, and view that area you have the power to protect for all times, with the designation of **The James Peak Wilderness and Protection Area Act as set forth in the Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 1576.**

1. Benedict, James B. *The Fourth of July Valley*, Research Report, No. 2., Center for Mountain Archeology, Ward, Colorado, 1981, p. 8.
2. Black, Robert C. III. *Island in the Rockies - The History of Grand County Colorado, to 1930*, Pruett Publishing Company, Boulder, Colorado. 1969.

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